

MEMORIAL

OF

R. F. PINKNEY, A LIEUTENANT IN THE NAVY,

IN RELATION

To an alleged injustice done him in the narrative of the Exploring Expedition printed by order of Congress.

FEBRUARY 23, 1848.

Ordered to be printed.

To the honorable the Senate of the United States :

The memorial of Robert F. Pinkney, a lieutenant in the navy of the United States,

RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH :

That he commanded the United States schooner Flying Fish during a part of the exploring expedition; and that subsequently, that is to say, from October 18, 1843, to September 8, 1847, he was absent from the United States in the frigate Savannah, on a cruise to the Pacific ocean. Your memorialist begs leave to remind your honorable body that, during the period above stated, a memorial was presented to the Senate of the United States by certain officers of the exploring expedition, setting forth that erroneous statements impeaching their official character had been published in a narrative of the exploring expedition under the auspices of Congress: further, that the character of your memorialist is attacked in the said narrative; and that, since his return to the United States, he has seen a letter from Commander C. Wilkes to the chairman of the Library Committee, appended to a report printed by order of the Senate, in which letter the said Com. Wilkes, author of the narrative aforesaid, pretends to justify his former misstatements concerning your memorialist. That, out of a decent regard for his own honor, and a just desire to occupy his true position before your honorable body, your memorialist addressed a letter to Commander Wilkes, a copy of which, and of the said Commander Wilkes' answer thereto, will be found appended to this memorial. Finally, your memorialist respectfully prays that your honorable body will do him the justice to permit this memorial, and the copies of letters thereto appended, to be placed on the Journal of the Senate, so that his denial of the charge made against him under such auspices, by Commander Wilkes, may be found in the same archives from which the said charges derive importance.

And your memorialist will ever pray.

R. F. PINKNEY.

BALTIMORE, *January 18, 1848.*

SIR: I have recently had my attention called to the memorial of certain officers of the exploring expedition to Congress, and to the report thereon made by Mr. Pearce, of the United States Senate, to which is appended a communication from you. I gratefully appreciate the kindness of my friends in assuming, in my absence, my vindication against the charges which you have ventured to place upon the historical record of the expedition. I should have rejoiced if your sense of duty, controlled by the obligations of truth and honor, had induced you to acknowledge the justice of their criticisms, so far as your allusions to me were concerned: I might thereby have been saved the necessity of calling your attention in my own name to erroneous statements in respect to me, and of requesting you to do me that justice, which, now that the excitement arising from past controversy is ended, it should be your pleasure to do. I call your attention especially to the charge contained in vol. 1, page 332, of "awkwardness and a want of knowledge of seamanship" in the management of the Flying Fish; and to your statement (vol. 2, page 359) as to my absence from duty, from sickness, during an important period of the cruise. The testimony before the court-martial, about the first of these matters, as presented in the memorial, and the evidence furnished by the log-book in reference to the other, would seem to be conclusive as to these errors in your narrative; and if such shall, upon reflection, be your opinion, I feel that I have a right to ask that you will do me the justice to express it in your reply to this.

In a letter to me, dated October 14, 1842, the late Commander R. A. Jones says, "Lieutenant Wilkes requested me to state that he had no feeling of enmity towards you." I cannot but hope that, in proof of your sincerity in the assurances you gave my friend, Commander Jones, you will so act in this matter as to render unnecessary any further proceedings which a sacred regard for the truth, and a determination to vindicate my own honor, may otherwise compel me to adopt.

Respectfully,

R. F. PINKNEY.

To Commander WILKES.

WASHINGTON CITY, *January 20, 1848.*

SIR: The report of the Hon. James A. Pearce to the Senate of the United States, containing my answer to the memorial of officers last year, would have been a sufficient answer to your letter had I supposed the full bearing of it had been perceived by you; but I am far from taking exception to what I believe does not now exist with you, and I am willing to consider with yourself, "that the excitement arising from past controversy is ended."

With regard to the paragraphs alluded to, (by you,) with many others, much more importance has been given to them by the officers than ever was intended by me, or, in the opinion of disinterested persons, should have been put upon them. Finding, however, that the officers think otherwise, I have long since determined to erase or so modify them in a second edition, that the sensitive feelings of officers will not be touched.

I am, very respectfully, yours,

CHARLES WILKES.

To Lieut. R. F. PINKNEY, U. S. N.,
Baltimore.